

Dean's account of meetings and conversations with Nixon.

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MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT - SEPTEMBER 15, 1972

On September 15 the Justice Department announced the handing down of the seven indictments by the Federal grand jury investigating the Watergate. Late that afternoon I received a call requesting me to come to the President's Oval Office. When I arrived at the Oval Office I found Haldeman and the President. The President asked me to sit down. Both men appeared to be in very good spirits and my reception was very warm and cordial. The President then told me that Bob—referring to Haldeman—had kept him posted on my handling of the Watergate case. The President told me I had done a good job and he appreciated how difficult a task it had been and the President was pleased that the case had stopped with Liddy. I responded that I could not take credit because others had done much more difficult things than I had done. As the President discussed the present status of the situation I told him that all that I had been able to do was to contain the case and assist in keeping it out of the White House. I also told him that there was a long way to go before this matter would end and that I certainly could make no assurances that the day would not come when this matter would start to unravel.

*See p. 1173.

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Early in our conversation the President said to me that former FBI Director Hoover had told him shortly after he had assumed office in 1969 that his campaign had been bugged in 1968. The President said that at some point we should get the facts out on this and use this to counter the problems that we were encountering.

The President asked me when the criminal case would come to trial and would it start before the election. I told the President that I did not know. I said that the Justice Department had held off as long as possible the return of the indictments, but much would depend on which judge got the case. The President said that he certainly hoped that the case would not come to trial before the election.

The President then asked me about the civil cases that had been filed by the Democratic National Committee and the common cause case and about the counter suits that we had filed. I told him that the lawyers at the reelection committee were handling these cases and that they did not see the common cause suit as any real problem before the election because they thought they could keep it tied up in discovery proceedings. I then told the President that the lawyers at the reelection committee were very hopeful of slowing down the civil suit filed by the Democratic National Committee because they had been making ex parte contacts with the judge handling the case and the judge was very understanding and trying to accommodate their problems. The

President was pleased to hear this and responded to the effect that, "Well, that's helpful." I also recall explaining to the President about the suits that the reelection committee lawyers had filed against the Democrats as part of their counteroffensive.

There was a brief discussion about the potential hearings before the Patman committee. The President asked me what we were doing to deal with the hearings and I reported that Dick Cook, who had once worked on Patman's committee staff, was working on the problem. The President indicated that Bill Timmons should stay on top of the hearings, that we did not need the hearings before the election.

The conversation then moved to the press coverage of the Watergate incident and how the press was really trying to make this into a major campaign issue. At one point in this conversation I recall the President telling me to keep a good list of the press people giving us trouble, because we will make life difficult for them after the election. The conversation then turned to the use of the Internal Revenue Service to attack our enemies. I recall telling the President that we had not made much use of this because the White House did not have the clout to have it done, that the Internal Revenue Service was a rather democratically oriented bureaucracy and it would be very dangerous to try any such activities. The President seemed somewhat annoyed and said that the Democratic administrations had used this tool well and after the election we would get people in these agencies who would be responsive to the White House requirements.

The conversation then turned to the President's postelection plans to replace people who were not on our team in all the agencies. It was at this point that Haldeman, I remember, started taking notes and he also told the President that he had been developing information on which people should stay and which should go after the election. I recall that several days after my meeting with the President, I was talking to Dan Kingsley, who was in charge of developing the list for

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Haldeman as to people who should be removed after the election. I told Kingsley that this matter had come up during my conversation with the President and he said he had wondered what had put new life into his project as he had received several calls from Higby about the status of his project within the last few days. The meeting ended with a conversation with the President about a book I was reading.

I left the meeting with the impression that the President was well aware of what had been going on regarding the success of keeping the White House out of the Watergate scandal and I also had expressed to him my concern that I was not confident that the coverup could be maintained indefinitely.

MEETING OF MARCH 13TH

This was a rather lengthy meeting, the bulk of which was taken up by a discussion about the Gray hearings and the fact that the Senate Judiciary Committee

had voted to invite me to appear in connection with Gray's nomination. It was at this time we discussed the potential of litigating the matter of executive privilege and thereby preventing any body from going before any Senate committee until the matter was resolved. The President liked the idea very much, particularly when mentioned to him that it might be possible that he could also claim attorney client privilege on me so that the strongest potential case on executive privilege would probably rest on the Counsel to the President.

I told him that obviously this area would have to be researched. He told me that he did not want Haldeman and Ehrlichman to go before the Ervin hearings and that if we were litigating the matter on Dean, that no one would have to appear. Toward the end of the conversation, we got into a discussion of Watergate matter specifically. I told the President about the fact that there were money demands being made by the seven convicted defendants. And that the sentencing of these individuals was not far off. It was during this conversation that Haldeman came into the office. After this brief interruption by Haldeman's coming in, but while he was still there, I told the President about the fact that there was no money to pay these individuals to meet their demands. He asked me how much it would cost. I told him that I could only make an estimate that it might be as high as a million dollars

or more. He told me that that was no problem, and he also looked over at Haldeman and repeated the same statement.

He then asked me who was demanding this money and I told him it was principally coming from Hunt through his attorney. The President then referred to the fact that Hunt had been promised executive clemency. He said that he had discussed this matter with Ehrlichman and contrary to instructions that Ehrlichman had given Colson not to talk to the President about it, that Colson had also discussed it with him later. He expressed some annoyance at the fact that Colson had also discussed this matter with him.

The conversation then turned back to a question from the President regarding the money that was paid to the defendants. He asked me how this was done. I told him I didn't know much about it other than the fact that the money was laundered so it could not be traced and then there were secret deliveries. I told him I was learning about things I had never known before, but the next time I would certainly be more knowledgeable. This comment got a laugh out of Haldeman. The meeting ended on this note and there was no further discussion of the matter and it was left hanging just as I have described it.

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MEETING ON MARCH 13TH

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MEETING OF MARCH 21ST

As I have indicated, my purpose in requesting this meeting particularly with the President was that I felt it necessary that I give him a full report of all the facts that I knew and explain to him what I believed to be the implication of those facts. It was my particular concern with the fact that the President did not seem to understand the implications of what was going on.

For example, when I had earlier told him that I thought I was involved in an obstruction of justice situation he had argued with me to the contrary after I had explained it to him. Also, when the matter of money demands had come up previously he had very nonchalantly told me that that was no problem and I did not know if he realized that he himself could be getting involved in an obstruction of justice situation by having promised clemency to Hunt. What I had hoped to do in this conversation was to have the President tell me that we had to end the matter now.

I began by telling the President that there was a cancer growing on the Presidency and that if the cancer was not removed that the President himself would be killed by it. I also told him that it was important that this cancer be removed immediately because it was growing more deadly every day. I then gave him what I told him would be a broad overview of the situation.

Highlights Described

I told him I did not know if Mitchell had approved the plans but I had been told that Mitchell had been a recipient of the wiretap information and that Haldeman had also received such information through Strachan. I then proceeded to tell him some of the highlights that

had occurred during the cover-up. I told him that Kalmbach had been used to raise funds to pay these seven individuals for their silence at the instructions of Ehrlichman, Haldeman, and Mitchell and I had been the conveyor of this instruction to Kalmbach. I told him that after the decision had been made that Magruder was to remain at the re-election committee I had assisted Magruder in preparing his false story for presentation to the grand jury. I told him that cash that had been at the White House had been funneled back to the re-election committee for the purpose of paying the seven individuals to remain silent.

I then proceeded to tell him that perjury had been committed, and for this cover-up to continue it would require more paying and more money. I told him that the demands of the convicted individuals were constantly increasing. I then told the President how this was just typical of the type of blackmail that the White House would continue to be subjected to and that I didn't know how to deal with it.

I also told the President that I thought that I would, as a result of my name coming out during the Gray hearings, be called before the grand jury and that if I was called to testify before the grand jury or the Senate committee I would have to tell the facts the way I know them. I said I did not know if executive privilege would be applicable to any appearance I might have before the grand jury.

I concluded by saying that

it was going to take continued perjury and continued support of these individuals to perpetuate the cover-up and that I did not believe it was possible to continue it; rather I thought it was time for surgery on the cancer itself and that all those involved must stand up and account for themselves and that the President himself get out in front of this matter. I told the President that I did not believe that all of the seven defendants would maintain their silence forever. In fact, I thought that one or more would very likely break rank.

After I finished, I realized that I had not really made the President understand because after he asked a few questions, he suggested that it would be an excellent idea if I gave some sort of briefing to the Cabinet and that he was very impressed with my knowledge of the circumstances but he did not seem particularly concerned with their implications.

It was after my presentation to the President and during our subsequent conversation the President called Haldeman into the office and the President suggested that we have a meeting with Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman to discuss how to deal with this situation. What emerged from that discussion after Haldeman came into the office was that John Mitchell should account for himself for the pre-June 17th activities and the President did not seem concerned about the activities which had occurred after June 17th.

MEETING OF MARCH 22

The arrangements had been made to have a meeting after lunch with the President with Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Mitchell, and myself. Mr. Mitchell came to Washington that morning for a meeting in Haldeman's office in which Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Haldeman, and

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myself were present. I recall that one of the first things that Ehrlichman asked of Mitchell was whether Hunt's money problem had been taken care of. Mitchell said that he didn't think it was a problem any further. There then followed a general discussion of the status of the Senate hearings, and the discussion never got down to specifics.

It had been my impression that Haldeman and Ehrlichman were going to try to get Mitchell to come forward and explain his involvement in the matter. This did not occur. Mitchell said that he thought everything was going along very well with the exception of the posture of the President on executive privilege. He said that he felt that the President was going to have to back down somewhat or it would appear he was preventing information from coming out of the White House.

I recall that Ehrlichman left the meeting before it had terminated because he was going to meet Secretary Shultz, who was coming in from out of the country. I was also called out of the meeting about noontime when a message was sent to me by Ziegler that it was important he see me immediately. This had to do with the statement that was running on the wires that Gray had said that I had probably lied and Ziegler wanted to know how to handle it. Accordingly, I departed the meeting and went into a meeting with Ziegler and Moore to discuss Gray's comment. I returned to Haldeman's office where Mitchell and Haldeman and I had lunch.

During lunch there was some continued conversation about the general problems. Mr. Mitchell raised the fact that F. Lee Bailey, who had been very helpful in dealing with McCord, had a problem that he would like to bring up. He said that Mr. Bailey had a client who had an enormous amount of gold in his possession and would like to make an arrangement with the Government whereby the gold could be turned over to the Government without the individual being prosecuted for holding the gold. Mitchell was addressing his request for assistance to Haldeman but Haldeman was nonresponsive and the matter was dropped.

I again departed Mr. Haldeman's office to have further dealings with Moore and Ziegler and Haldeman told me that there would be a meeting in the President's EOB office about 1:30 and that I should come directly from Ziegler's office when I got my problem worked out regarding Gray's statement. I arrived about 1:30 in the President's Office but the President was not ready to hold the meeting yet.

The meeting with the President, Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Mitchell, and me was again a general discussion of the Senate Watergate hear-

ings situation and, did not accomplish anything. Rather it was a further indication that there would be no effort to stop the coverup from continuing. I recall that Mitchell told the President that he felt that the only problem that he now had was the fact that he was taking a public beating on his posture on executive privilege; that the statement on executive privilege was too broad and that probably something should be done to change his posture on the matter.

Mitchell was not suggesting that members of the White House go to the Hill to testify, rather that some more cooperative position be developed to avoid the adverse publicity. It was at this time that the President said that Kleindienst was supposed to be working these things out with Senator Baker and he apparently had not been doing so. The President said that Timmons had told him that a member of

Senator Baker's staff was very desirous of a meeting to get guidance. It was at this point that the President called the Attorney General and told him that he should get up to meet with Senator Baker as soon as possible and get some of these problems regarding executive privilege and the turning of documents over resolved with the committee immediately. After the conversation with the Attorney General, there was a continued discussion of how to deal with the Ervin committee. I asked the President to excuse me from the meeting for a moment because I was working with Ziegler on a response to a statement that Gray had made. The President asked me what that was about and I then explained to him about Gray's statement. I told him what Gray had said and I also told him what the facts were. He excused me to use the telephone in his office and said that I should get that resolved as quickly as possible.

When I returned to the conversation with the President, Mitchell, Haldeman, and Ehrlichman, they were still talking about dealing with the Ervin committee. The President told me that the White House should start directly dealing with the committee and that I should go up and commence discussions with Senator Ervin as to the parameters of executive privilege.

I told the President that I did not think this would be wise because I was very much the party in issue with regard to the Judiciary Committee hearings and that it would be unwise for me to go to the Hill and negotiate my own situation. The President agreed and Ehrlichman said that he would commence discussions.

The meeting was almost exclusively on the subject of how the White House should posture itself vis-a-vis the Ervin committee hearings. There was absolutely no indication of any changed attitude and it was like one of many, many meetings I had been in before, in which the talk was of strategies for dealing with the hearings rather than any effort to get the truth out as to what had happened both before June 17 and after June 17.

Following this meeting with the President, it was apparent to me that I had failed in turning the President around on this subject, but Ehrlichman and Haldeman began taking over with regard to dealing with a new problem, which had become John Dean, as they were aware of the fact that I was very unhappy about the situation.

MEETING WITH THE
PRESIDENT APRIL 15TH

The President was very cordial when we met. I told the President that I had gone to the prosecutors. And, that I did not believe that this was an act of disloyalty but, rather in the end it would be an act of loyalty. I informed the President that I told the prosecutors of my own involvement and the involvement of others. The President almost from the outset began asking me a number of leading questions, which made me think that the conversation was being taped and that a record was being made to protect himself.

I also recall that the conversation turned to the matter of Liddy not talking. He said something about Liddy was waiting for a signal and I told him that possibly he was waiting for a signal from the President.

It was during this part of the conversation that the President picked up the telephone and called Henry Peterson and pretended with Peterson that I was not in the room but that the matter of Liddy's coming forward and talking had arisen during our conversation. The President relayed to Peterson that if Liddy's lawyer wanted to see him to get a signal that the President was willing to do this. The President also asked me about Peterson and I told him if anyone could give him good advice Henry Peterson could.

Toward the end of the conversation the President recalled the fact that at one point we had discussed the difficulty in raising money

and that he had said that one million dollars was nothing to raise to pay to maintain the silence of the defendants. He said that he had, of course, only been joking when he made that comment. As the conversation went on, and it is impossible for me to recall anything other than the high points of it, I became more convinced that the President was seeking to elicit testimony from me and put his perspective on the record and get me to agree to it. The most interesting thing that happened during the conversation was, very near the end, he got up out of his chair, went behind his chair to the corner of the Executive Office Building office and in a barely audible tone said to me, he was probably foolish to have discussed Hunt's clemency with Colson. I do not recall that I responded. The conversation ended shortly thereafter.